November Gardening Tips

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Here in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the first signs of fall appear in October. By the end of October, cool nights are the norm, and by November, frost is a given. The autumn leaves have all turned and most of the trees are bare. It is deer hunting season, and so we garden sparingly, as our property is adjacent to several hundred acres of forest land leased by the local hunting club. We prefer to hike at this time of year, and the photo above was taken on the Mount Pleasant trail, in Amherst County, a short drive from our farm, Seven Oaks.

November is the month for reflection, for final garden tidying, for counting blessings and joys and planning the year to come. It is the month to ready Christmas plants and plans, to take the last pots of annuals indoors to winter over, to put away the garden ornaments and tools. It is the time for garden endings and the start of family beginnings. It is the fall harvest.

November Gardening Tasks

- Cut back chrysanthemums when they're finished blooming and throw away the stems. You can cut them down right to the ground. Place mulch around the plants.
- Peonies, iris and other perennials can also be safely cut back. Be sure to throw away, not compost, the stems. This keeps microbes and diseases from infecting your compost pile and re-infecting plants in the spring. Mulch.
- Strawberries can be mulched with pine straw mulch or plain straw after the first hard frost.
- Rake around fruit trees and remove any leftover fruit.
- Turn the compost pile one last time.
- Give the lawn a final cutting and edging, then clean lawn mowers and lawn care tools. Follow the care instructions in your machine's user manual for proper storage. Add lawn grass and mulched autumn leaves to the compost pile.
- Clean and store all garden ornaments, especially clay, terra cotta and resin. All of these materials will crack if exposed to freezing and thawing temperatures.
- Clean and sharpen tools such as secateurs, trimmers, and hand pruners. Make sure you store them where you can find them again next spring.
- If you've forgotten to plant your spring bulbs, do so now, before the ground is too hard to dig. As long as you can dig in the soil, you can plant them until December. After that, they can only be forced in pots.
- Hang bird feeders high enough in trees to make it difficult for your cats (or your neighbors' cats) to use them as "birdie lures"!

- Fill feeders with seed and stock up on bird seed. Store it in the garage in an air - and mouse - tight container.
- Got Halloween pumpkins? Cut them up and give them to the squirrels!
- Plant amaryllis bulbs now for holiday blooms.
- Now is the time to fertilize holiday cacti as well as African violet plants. Consider taking cuttings from both and starting them now; you may have one well enough along to give as a holiday gift, or at least to enjoy in the spring.
- Did you know that foliage plants need to be dusted? You can take a dry, clean cloth (one that hasn't been used with furniture polish) and dust the leaves. Or, place the plant in the shower and give it a bath! Use clear water to rinse dust off the leaves. Peace lilies especially like this. Just let the water drain away or else you'll get a bath moving the plant back to its area.

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